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LETTER

TO THE

PEOPLE OF IRELAND,

ON THE

PRESENT SITUATION OF THE COUNTRY.

BY THOMAS RUSSELL,
—AN UNITED IRISHMAN.—

none in Fort George

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TO THE

PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

"IT IS A GOODLY THING, BRETHREN, TO DWELL "TOGETHER IN UNITY."—*Pſalms.*

FROM the time that the Convention of Volunteers failed in obtaining their great object of Reform in the year 1784, the ſpirit of the nation gradually declined; and in the year 1791, and the preceding ones, it may be ſaid to have been utterly extinguiſhed. The propriety of Reform ſeemed to be allowed by all, but thoſe who had an intereſt in the government; and it was loſt by that body not eſpouſing the claims of the *Catholics*. By this it became only an effort of a *part* of the people, and was loſt, and deſerved ſo to be.—This dereliction of Catholic claims did not ariſe from a want of liberality in the bulk of the Volunteers; (for their reſolutions and declarations, particularly the Northern ones, at the time of that memorable and illuſtrious inſtitution,

aſſert the right of the Catholics in the moſt explicit manner) but from their placing too great a confidence in *their leaders*, who were men of the firſt lordly and landed intereſts in Ireland, and who ſhamefully and meanly deſerted the people.

The Catholics at that time were led, from the derelict̃ion of their cauſe by the Convention, to entertain no hopes from the liberality or juſtice of the Proteſtant or Diſſenting intereſt. The great maſs of that body were then and before ignorant of and unintereſted in the general politics of Ireland. Unacquainted with the remote cauſe, they felt nothing but the oppreſſion of the tax-gatherer, tythe-proctors, and their landlords. Unconnected by any band of union, and having none of ability, education, conſequence, or integrity to eſpouſe their cauſe, they remained in a ſtate of hopeleſs deſpondency; or if any attempted to redreſs what they conceived to be grievances, by partial diſturbance, they were cruſhed in a moment by the power of government, ſupported by the whole landed and eccleſiaſtical bodies. Severe puniſhments were inflicted; and the moſt odious ideas of criminality were annexed to thoſe unfortunate offenders, while no ſerious enquiry was inſtituted into the real or ſuppoſed grievances which led theſe wretched and ignorant beings to tranſgreſs laws which they had no ſhare in framing; but which if they did not obey, death or exile, or ſuch puniſhment as the framers thought proper to annex to the action, was certain to follow.

Such a ſyſtem muſt and did produce a degredation of ſpirit, and they looked up not to juſtice and the rights of nature, but to the diſcretion of their landlords and magiſtrates. The Catholic gentry, with ſome exceptions, were men, who being precluded by the laws from ſharing any of the power of Ireland, to which their fortunes and ſa-

milies gave them pretenſions, could only engage in the pleaſurable purſuits of the times, and from an adherence to their conſcience, found themſelves inferior in point of political conſequence to every petty Proteſtant Squire. Perſonal courage, neceſſary to protect them from perſonal inſult, they poſſeſſed to an eminent degree; but a century of ſlavery had diveſted them of political courage or a wiſh for political diſquiſition. Their moſt daring and adventurous ſpirits, acquired in all the armies of Europe, (England excepted) an high and deſerving reputation. By them it was that the name of Ireland was heard out of its limits; for otherwiſe the town of Birmingham was as well known, and poſſeſſed as much weight in the ſcale of Europe and the Britiſh empire, as the iſland which we inhabit has ever done ſince the capitulation of Limerick.

The Catholics of the city of Dublin were, generally ſpeaking, the moſt enlightened of that body. Many of them had the wiſh and the hope that the day would arrive when the Proteſtants of Ireland would ſee their true intereſts, and ſtrenuouſly endeavour to place all their countrymen on a level with themſelves.

The only political organization of the Catholics was a committee, compoſed of ſome members, elected moſtly from the city of Dublin, and in which the Catholic lords and ſome of the gentry aſſumed the right of voting. They were a body which made humble applications to government from time to time, but were very little attended to. The impreſſion which government, and not unſucceſsfully, wiſhed to make on them was, that government were willing to ſerve them, but that the Preſbyterians and Proteſtants were againſt it, and ſo recommended loyal and dutiful behaviour. Indeed, of ſo little conſequence were the Catholics conſidered, that in the ſummer of 90, or 91, the then lord lieutenant, Lord Weſtmorland, being in the ſouth, refuſed to receive a dutiful and loyal addreſs from

the Catholics of one of the ſouthern cities; becauſe, in it they expreſſed a hope that their caſe might be taken into conſideration.

There was no national ſpirit in Ireland—on the contrary the anniverſary of thoſe events which led to the degradation of the country were celebrated, ſtrange as it may appear, by Iriſhmen with martial pomp and feſtivity, differing in this from all nations, ancient or modern: if any felt differently they prudently concealed their ſentiments.

The great Proteſtant landholders had the repreſentation of the people, as it is called, in their own hands; the power of returning members to the Houſe of Commons, even for counties, with one or two exceptions was in the hands of a few leading men in each diſtrict: when theſe could not agree as to the perſon who was to be called a re-repreſentative of the people, the ſpeculations ran "that "my Lord ſuch-a-one's intereſt joined to Sir John ſuch-a-"one, would ſucceed in returning Mr. ſuch-a-one againſt "the Marquis of ſuch-a-one." As to the intereſt or wiſhes of the community, that was not pretended to, and the men thus returned had the power, for the power of England was to ſupport them, of taxing the people of Ireland to what amount their honours and conſciences directed. It was an eaſy, pleaſant, and lucrative taſk to govern ſuch a country: the perſon ſent over had only to engage ſo many of the great land and borough-holders in his intereſt as inſured a hollow majority in the Commons, and as theſe gentlemen and their friends could be renumerated by the taxes they impoſed on Ireland, and the places created there, it did not coſt the Engliſh agent much. However, as œconomy is a virtue, it was practiſed by the Engliſh agent in ſome reſpects, for he did not retain, except in caſes of emergency, more than was ſufficient to do the king's buſineſs; by this means he had a greater number of places and

emoluments to beſtow on his Engliſh friends, and ſuch as were uſeful to the Engliſh miniſtry elſewhere.

From this ſyſtem, it is obvious that the intereſts of ſome of theſe landholders will in ſmaller matters claſh with each other; though in the main object, that of holding in their hands the power of the country againſt the people at large, they will agree. In proportion then as the people ſhow any deſire to aſſume political conſequence, theſe gentlemen will all unite with the Engliſh party againſt the common enemy—the people—and in proportion as the people are cruſhed and torpid, the ſeperate intereſt of theſe gentlemen in counties and boroughs, making of roads, canals, exciſemen, commiſſioners, biſhops, judges, &c. &c. &c. will be conſidered, and differences will ariſe: this will ſerve as a clue to the parliamentary debates. Let them be taken, for example, about the year 1791. Three or four years previous to that, ſome of theſe gentlemen formed what was termed an oppoſition in Parliament, and indeed no word could have explained their views better, for they were not more adverſe to the government whoſe places they wiſhed to obtain, than they were to the vital intereſts of Ireland, and the inalienable rights and liberties of mankind.

It was neceſſary that ſuch a body ſhould hold forth ſome meaſures, which might give them a degree of popularity, as without that their oppoſition would be fruitleſs, the majority of the landholders being engaged on the other ſide, ſo that it could only be by public opinion that they could ouſt the gentlemen of the party of Government and themſelves attain their ſtations.

It was likewiſe neceſſary, that the points held forth ſhould not be ſuch as would endanger the *common cauſe*, and they acted accordingly. Whoever takes the trouble of referring to the debates of theſe years will ſee this ſtatement verified. The ſcheme, however well laid, did not

ſucceed; the people had too much apathy or rather too much wiſdom to intereſt themſelves in the cauſe, and the ability of theſe gentlemen (certainly firſt rate) was exhauſted night after night, and ſeſſion after ſeſſion, haranguing in vain—all the argument was on their ſide; but the dead majority who did not come to argue but to vote, was on the ſide of government. They exhauſted themſelves therefore without producing any effect, except that of detaining the government members once or twice a week, during a ſeſſion, from their feſtivity till a late hour.

Now that the motives aſſigned above were the true ones which influenced the gentlemen of oppoſition can ſcarce be doubted from their conduct in the ſeſſion of 92, when the Catholic queſtion and that of reform forced themſelves on the government: this was the act of the *common enemy*, the people of Ireland, and to be vigorouſly reſiſted, and accordingly no perſons reviled the Rights of Man or the French Revolution, or gabbled more about anarchy, and confuſion, and mobs, and United Iriſhmen, and Defenders, and Volunteers, or coincided more heartily in ſtrengthening the hands of that government which they had oppoſed, and riveting the chains of the people, or to ſum up all, plunged this unfortunate country into all the guilt and calamity of the preſent war with more alacrity than the gentlemen of the oppoſition.

This ariſtocracy, or oligarchy, governed Ireland with deſpotick ſway; ſuch a ſyſtem could only be upheld, either—1ſt, by foreign and extrinſick power, which could at any time cruſh the whole nation—2d, by ignorance—3d, by cowardice—4th, by want of military reſources in the people—or finally, by the diſunion of the people among themſelves. Now, as to the firſt, though England be the moſt powerful of the two nations, yet it is undeniable that much of that power has been, and now is

derived from the connection between the two iſlands; if any perſon doubts of this, let him conſider the immenſe reſources in proviſions and men drawn from this country during the different wars in which England has thought proper to engage. Suppoſe every Iriſh ſoldier withdrawn from the Engliſh armies, what a figure would they make? How would they protect thoſe foreign poſſeſſions which are ſo much vaunted of, and to which Iriſh merchants are forbidden to trade? It is ſaid that the Engliſh fleets cover the ocean—how could theſe fleets be proviſioned if Ireland did not furniſh it? If every Iriſh ſeaman had been withdrawn from the Engliſh fleet on the firſt of June, will any man in his ſenſes ſay, that that memorable victory would ever have been obtained? It were eaſy to dilate on this, and to puſh it ſtill farther, by ſhewing that if Ireland, inſtead of being neutral in any conteſt (particularly the preſent) in which England was engaged, was hoſtile, the commercial pre-eminence of England, on which her political power is founded, would not be eclipſed, but extinguiſhed. As to the ſecond head—ignorance, in a philoſophical ſenſe of the word, may be conſidered as the ſole cauſe that can make people ſlaves or wicked; but in the general acceptation of the term, there was a ſufficient degree of political knowledge diffuſed to ſhew the people their rights. As to the third—the military hiſtory of every ſtate of Europe bears ſuch ample teſtimony to the gallantry of the Iriſh, as renders any argument on this head unneceſſary: it may, however, be obſerved, that it is very poſſible, and frequently happens, that a perſon who poſſeſſes perſonal courage to an eminent degree, may be deficient in political, and that the apprehenſion of a conſtable or jail will deter, where a company of grenadiers or a battery would not; this ariſes from the notion of always attaching moral guilt to the breach of human laws, an error of the greateſt magnitude. As to the fourth—a bare inſpection of the

ſituation of Ireland, and reference to what has been ſaid under the firſt head is ſufficient.

The only cauſe then adequate to depreſs ſuch a people was diſunion—ſo long as that prevailed, ſo long could this ariſtocracy plunder and inſult the country, and even quarrel among themſelves for the diviſion of the ſpoil with impunity; but when ever an UNION of the people takes place—when they once conſider all Iriſhmen as their friends and brethren, the power of this ariſtocracy will vaniſh—nor is this abſtract reaſoning: let facts be appealed to.

In the year 1791 it was projected by a few individuals, who were abhorrent of the mode in which Ireland was governed, to baniſh religious prejudices by effecting a union of Iriſhmen of all religious perſuaſions, and by that means to obtain a reform of Parliament, which ſhould equally include Iriſhmen of every ſect. In purſuance of this plan the famous ſociety of *United Iriſhmen* was formed in Belfaſt, in the month of October, and in Dublin in the month of November, of that year, and it was intended to ſpread ſimilar aſſociations through the country; as it was evident that when once the people knew each other, intereſt as well as affection, would make their friendſhip permanent. Means were taken to make the Proteſtant of the North and the Catholics of the South underſtand their mutual views. —In this winter the independent part of the Catholic Committee differed from their ariſtocracy of lords and gentlemen, and, by a deciſive majority, freed themſelves from thoſe hereditary adviſers. A few of theſe gentlemen publiſhed an addreſs, ſuch as government wiſhed—but as all who iſolate themſelves from the maſs of their party do, they ſoon became inſignificant. That ſeſſion produced ſome trifling relaxation of the penal code; but this did not deter the independent part of the Catholics, who perſiſted in urging their claims. The great body of Diſſenters were rapidly embracing and promoting them; and the calling a

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General Committee of the Catholics, who could fully and indiſputably repreſent the wants and ſentiments of that body ſtill further ptomoted the great cauſe.

From the moment that the attempt at union was obvious, the ariſtocracy loſt no opportuninity of abuſing the ſyſtem, and all who were active in promoting it—and in the abſurd and wicked language of that faction, the union of a people ſo deſirable to every man of virtue and religion, was called an *unnatural union;* but it was againſt the meeting of the Catholic Committee that their chief efforts were directed, and in conſequence the Grand Juries, at the ſummer aſſizes, iſſued their reſolutions, of which the ſentiments and compoſition were equally contemptable.—Thoſe formidable denunciations, and the torrents of abuſe which were powered forth in the public prints, did not prevent the meeting of the Delegates of the Catholics in Dublin, on the 3d of December, 1792, a memorable day for Ireland. This meeting was ſanctioned by the great body of the Diſſenters, who, by aſſociations and reſolutions enforced their claims—and this may be conſidered as the act, and the only act for a length of time of the Iriſh people. Now what was the conſequence? The very government who, ſome time before ſlighted the Catholics and their claims, now *requeſted* to have the petition of the Catholics tranſmitted by them to the king, *and it was refuſed them;* and the very Parliament who met ſhortly after, and who had refuſed to liſten to any alteration, now acknowledged the propriety of *a reform*, and were willing to concede one. Now it is obvious that this alteration could have ariſen only from the union and ſpirit of the people, no other adequate cauſe can be aſſigned. Moſt people were then of opinion that the great deſideratum of Ireland, a reform, would be obtained, and it apparently required little ability to enſure it. Had the ſame line of conduct been purſued, the unity of action and deſign which had hitherto produced ſuch great effects—if Catholic eman-

cipation had been conſidered but as a ſtep, and as a ſtep which would be almoſt uſeleſs, unleſs accompanied by reform, it probably would have ſucceeded. Had the Catholic petition been only preſented and left to its intrinſic weight, without comment or explanation, it is probable that the government and ariſtocracy, diſmayed as they were at that period, would have acceded to the wiſhes of the people;—but theſe hopes were diſappointed.

It is not here intended to go into the hiſtory of that period, or cenſure any body of men; it is only intended to point out the power of *union*, and the futility of any efforts without it. At this time ſome individuals were anxious to know *how much* government would grant to the Catholics. That any of the Catholics ſhould be ſatisfied with a partial repeal of the penal code, or even make the total repeal, their ultimate object was ſufficient to betray a want of unity in the deſign. From the *inſtant* that the government ſaw this, the cloud which hovered over them was diſſipated, as if by enchantment; that *inſtant* they took their ground; the Catholic bill was *procraſtinated;* ſtrong meaſures were adopted with the greateſt harmony and unanimity by Parliament; *part* of the people was attacked; the moſt ſpirited part of the north was dragooned; proclamations were iſſued; volunteers were diſarmed; arbitrary impriſonments were inflicted; proſecutions were inſtituted; the gun-powder and militia bills were paſſed; the nation was foil'd in its purſuit, and *put down;* terror was the order of the day; it could ſcarce be believed but by thoſe who were witneſs to it, how rapid the change was in the ſpirit of the metropolis, and ſo completely was the *common enemy, the people*, ſubdued, that long before the end of the ſeſſion, ſome of the oppoſition again ventured to rail at the government. The Catholic bill did not paſs till the month of April, and it may be doubted, whether, if the battle of Nerwindin and the defection of Dumourier had taken place ſooner, it would have paſſed into a law; and

had the royal aſſent been refuſed, there was no ſpirit in the nation to bring it forward in a ſhape likely to enſure its ſucceſs. But though the bill did paſs, yet the ſpirit of the people being for a time ſuppreſſed—the vital principle of union being for a time ſuſpended—and the political powers of the country remaining in the ſame hands, it was to be expected that the bulk of the Catholics would feel the vengeance of every petty country ariſtocracy *irritated* by their late defeat, every man muſt eaſily ſee that this was the caſe. Witneſs the proſecutions of Fay, Bird, Delahoyd, Byrne, &c. &c. &c. Witneſs the ſeverities exerciſed on the lower orders of Catholics, which continue to this day, and of which it is impoſſible to hear the true account without indignation and horror.

It was plain that the Catholic gentry would be equally odious on the ſame grounds; that any privilege to which they could aſpire under the act, that of being a grand juror or magiſtrate, could only make them the tail of an ariſtocracy which deteſted them, and the only real conſequence they could have would be from their intimate union with the Catholic body. Their intereſt then, as well as their duty ſhould have led them to make a common cauſe with the Catholics of their country: by this it is not meant that they ſhould ſupport them in any improper proceeding, but that they ſhould protect the poor with their fortunes, their ability, and their courage, whenever they were oppreſſed and mal-treated merely as catholics, of which the three laſt years afford ſo many cruel inſtances; by this conduct theſe gentlemen would not only have protected innocent men, they would have acquired a weight in their reſpective counties which would give efficacy to any future petitibn, and they would have been enabled effectually to put a ſtop to any "inſurrection or ſcene of anarchy, and confuſion, and murder, and plunder, and equality of property," (to make uſe of the cant invented by Mr. Pitt, and ſo induſtriouſly propagated by his underſtrappers.)

It is proper here to obſerve that it is by no means intimated that ſuch views were entertained by the lower order of people. It is well known that the traveller will receive in the moſt wretched cabbin in the wildeſt parts of Ireland all the hoſpitality that the circumſtances of the owner can afford: he will get his ſhare of the milk, if there is any, and of the potatoes; and if he has loſt his way he will be guided to the road for miles, and all this without the expectation or the wiſh for a reward: from ſuch a people the commiſſion of ſuch crimes are leſs to be expected, than from thoſe who ſo falſely and infamouſly traduce them.

But it unfortunately happened that in many inſtances the Catholic gentry attached themſelves to this ariſtocracy, or at leaſt did not protect the people. This often aroſe from the fear of being implicated as defenders, from the ſyſtem of terror which was then ſpread, and from the want of that *political courage* which has been before mentioned. The conſequence was, that ſuch men, without acquiring the confidence, or having any influence with the ariſtocracy, loſt all weight and influence with the lower orders, and thus became both inſignificant and inſecure. That the lower orders, thus left to themſelves, conceiving that they were oppreſſed and without people of knowledge or conſequence to adviſe or protect them, ſhould at times commit unjuſtifiable actions is not ſurpriſing. This was another inſtance of the misfortune of want of union. And it is certain that the Catholic body, ſince the paſſing of that bill, have been regarded with a jealous eye, and have not derived from it that ſecurity and importance, nor Ireland that degree of freedom which many expected. The very ſummer following, ſuch was the ſtrength of government and the weakneſs of the nation, that the militia act was enforced, though it was ſo obnoxious to the people that it was reſiſted in many counties, and much blood was ſpilled before it was carried into effect: A formidable Iriſh army was raiſed, armed and diſciplined, to keep Ireland in ſub-

jection; the armed peaſantry of one country were employed to ſubdue the peaſantry of another, who were reſiſting real or ſuppoſed grievances that they had felt in common. How this may ultimately affect the liberty of the country is yet to be ſeen; but it is probable that at preſent government would not be at ſuch ſuch pains to enforce ſuch an act, nor would they meet ſo much oppoſition it its execution.

The weakneſs of the country is ſtill further exemplified by what occurred during the adminiſtration of Earl Fitzwilliam, and on his removal. When Mr. Pitt deemed it expedient to dupe the Duke of Portland and ſome more of his party, it was generally underſtood that part of the bargain was, that the Iriſh affairs were to be managed by them, and Lord Fitzwilliam's appointment was in conſequence of that arrangement. This Portland party had ſome retainers in the Iriſh Parliament, who were part of the gentlemen of oppoſition, and they were to be in the adminiſtration under him; this was to be a government of conciliation, that is, ſome unimportant conceſſions were to be made; but by them the great point a blind obedience to the Engliſh influence and adminiſtration, particularly in regard to the preſent war, was to be enſured. The views of that government were developed in a ſpeech of conſiderable length and ability, by one of the leading members at the opening of the ſeſſion. Domeſtic inſurgents, &c. &c. were to be cruſhed; we were at all riſques to ſtand and fall with England, and in conſequence the war with France was to be carried on with the greateſt vigour. In this ſpeech it was that the war was prophanely ſtyled a war to preſerve man and the Godhead. Immenſe ſums were voted and taxes impoſed for theſe purpoſes. The great meaſure of conciliation was, the repeal of the remainder of the penal code. It was underſtood that this was certainly to take place. Addreſſes and petitions poured in from all parties in favour of it. However, ſo far from paſſing, this governor was recalled, and the addreſſes from

all parts of Ireland requeſted his ſtay, and the paſſing of the bill: he was *removed* and it was *rejected*; and the gentlemen of oppoſition from railing at the French, the ſeditious, the Defenders, &c. &c. were again at leiſure to reſume their old trade of railing againſt the government. Now the Catholics were evidently in favour of Lord Fitzwilliam, and likewiſe the Diſſenters: nevertheleſs, government did not ſcruple to act diametrically oppoſite to their ſentiments, thereby ſhewing how completely the ſpirit of the people was down in their judgements. But it is needleſs to multiply proofs, as every day affords inſtances of their diſregard to the wiſhes of Iriſhmen.

One curious fact came to light by the removal of Lord F. which ſhews what dependence is to be put in courts and ſtateſmen, and ſhould ſink deep in the mind of everyIriſhman. He aſſerts in his letter, in *vindication* of himſelf, "*that his orders from England and his own intions were not to bring on the Catholic queſtion if it could be kept back.*"

From that period new laws of an oppreſſive and ſanguinary nature have been enacted, and enforced for the purpoſe of extinguiſhing any ſpark of freedom that might yet exiſt. For the laſt eighteen months a ſyſtem of brotherly love and union and a revival of national ſpirit has been rapidly taking place among the people; it was to be expected that this would be oppoſed: Of late a ſet of men have appeared in different parts of the North, ſtyling themſelves ORANGE-MEN, and profeſſing themſelves to be inimical to the Catholics. Some of theſe called Orange-men in the county of Armagh were undoubted execrable villains and plunderers; but many have taken that name and arrayed themſelves by the inſtigation of artful and wicked men. Now as theſe Orange-men can have no real intereſt in this, and as many of them are very ignorant; and as ſome of them have appeared in places where no diſturbance on pretext of religion had taken place, and

as religious animoſities was the engine by which this county was kept in ſubjection; this may be conſidered as the laſt effort of the enemies of Ireland to prevent that union which when once effected will terminate their power. All, therefore, who value the liberty and peace of Ireland ſhould oppoſe this and all other attempts at diviſion, and endeavour ſo far as in them lies, to promote the union of Iriſhmen.

From the facts which have been ſtated, it appears, that if the ſpirit of union and nationality pervaded the Iriſh, they could with eaſe effect a proper reform of Parliament; and the examples of Holland, Switzerland, and America, countries leſs powerful than Ireland, ſhew that when a country is ſeriouſly bent on recovering or acquiring liberty, it is ſcarce poſſible to prevent them.

It remains to be proved, that it is not only the intereſt, but the *bounden indiſpenſable duty* of a nation and of every man in it, to aſſert and maintain their political rights.

Great pains have been taken to prevent the maſs of mankind from interfering in political purſuits; force, and argument, and witt, and ridicule, and invective, have been uſed by the governing party, and with ſuch ſucceſs, that any of the lower, or even middle rank of ſociety who engage in politics, have been, and are, conſidered not only as ridiculous, but in ſome degree culpable; even thoſe who are called *moral* writers, employed their talents on the ſame ſide, ſo that at laſt it became an indiſputed maxim that the poor were not to concern themſelves in what related to the government of the country in which they lived, nevertheleſs it is an error of the moſt pernicious nature, as will appear from conſidering the ſubject. Thoſe inſolent exſlavers of the human race, who wiſh to fetter the mind as well as the body, exclaim to the poor, "mind your looms, and your ſpades and ploughs; have you not the means of ſubſiſtence; can you not earn your bread, and have wives and get children; and are you not protect-

ed ſo long as you keep quiet; and have you not all that you can earn, except ſo much as is neceſſary for us to govern you; leave the government to wiſer heads and to people who underſtand it, and interfere no more!"

Now in the firſt place, think who this government party have for the moſt part been;—"by their fruits "ye ſhall know them;" look at their fruits in hiſtory, and ſee what terrible calamities the perfidy, ambition, avarice, and cruelty of theſe rulers have brought on mankind; look at the people who are ſaid to make laws for this country; look at ſome of that race who inherit great fortunes without the ſkill or capacity of being uſeful; thoſe fungus productions, who grow out of a diſeaſed ſtate of ſociety, and deſtroy as well the vigour as the beauty of that which nouriſhes them. Theſe are ſome of the wiſer heads; theſe are the hands in which the people are to repoſe their lives and properties; for whoſe ſpendid debaucheries they muſt be taxed; and for whoſe convenience they muſt fetter even their thoughts.

Now on what foundation do theſe arrogant claims reſt; it is not ſuperior virtue, for in ſuch hands power ſhould be veſted; on a fair compariſon it will be found, that the ariſtocracy have not a ſuperiority in that reſpect. Power, long continued in any mortal hands, has a tendency to corrupt; and when that power is derived from birth or fortune, and held independent of the people, it is ſtill more likely to be abuſed; it is not that they contribute more to the ſupport of the ſtate, for that is manifeſtly not the caſe. Suppoſing for a moment that the whole of the expence was defrayed by the rich, though they might with ſome colour of juſtice claim the excluſive right of making laws affecting property, yet this could never extend to laws affecting life—every man has a life to loſe, though perhaps no property—laws, therefore, affecting life, ſhould have his concurrence. But take any diſtrict,

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and ſee how much more the maſs of the people pay than the governing party; and it is ſtill more obvious, when the proportion which each pays according to his income is conſidered: Here, if a man of five pound income pays one, the proportion to a man of one thouſand pound income, would be two hundred pound; but this proportion is not obſerved: Again, each of theſe men have a chance of an equally numerous family; the man of fortune will have affluence after having paid his proportion; but it may happen that though a family could be ſupported on five pound, they could not on four, which is ſuppoſed to remain after paying the taxes—and here again there is no proportion: Further, it might be thus argued, if the rich men derived their wealth by digging it out of the earth, or received it from a foreign land, but the fact is, the rich men (thoſe whoſe wealth ariſes from commerce excepted) derive their wealth from the labours of the poor. The poſſeſſion of land without cultivators is of no value to a man, except ſo much as could ſupport himſelf, and that ſeveral of theſe gentlemen who viliſy the mob would be but ill qualified to do.

It is not here intended to queſtion the right of landed property; but merely to ſhew, as is evident from theſe conſiderations, that even in a pecuniary view, the maſs of the people are entitled to a ſhare in the government as well as the rich.

Agriculture is the baſis of all riches, commercial as well as others; the earth was given to man by he who alone had a right to give it, for his ſubſiſtence; let not thoſe then who raiſe the fruits of it among us be deſpiſed. But theſe are in the language of the great:—"the mob, the rabble, the beggars on the bridge, the grey-coated men, whoſe views are anarchy and plunder, and whoſe means are bloodſhed and murder—are ſuch men to be truſted with power? No. Keep them down—do they complain, diſregard them—do they reſiſt, dragoon them—ſend an army to

burn their houſes, and murder them with the bayonet or the gibbet.

The God of Heaven and earth endowed theſe men with the ſame paſſions and the ſame reaſon as the great, and conſequently qualified them for the ſame liberty, happineſs and virtue; but theſe gentlemen conceive themſelves wiſer than the Deity; they find that he was wrong, and ſet about rectifying his work; they find the moral qualities and political rights of their fellow-creatures commenſurate with their fortunes; they puniſh the poverty which their own inſatiable avarice in a great degree creates; and thus, as in every caſe, when the will of God is departed from, inſtead of order, confuſion, folly, and guilt is produced either immediately or ultimately. How different was the conduct of him in whom we profeſs to believe? What did he who knew the hearts of man, ſay of the great and powerful? He did not revile the poor—he comforted, he inſtructed, he bleſſed them, he forgave them their ſins, and declared the judgments of God on ſuch as laid on them grievous burthens and hard to be borne.

Though it appears that the maſs of mankind have a RIGHT to political freedom, yet the extent of the DUTY which is incumbent on every member of ſociety in conſequence, does not ſeem to be ſufficiently attended to, notwithſtanding it is a duty of the greateſt magnitude, as will appear from the following conſiderations:

1ſt, No man can doubt that as a moral agent he is accountable to God for the uſe to which he applies his money, his ſtrength, his time, and his abilities.

2d, If one man was applied to by another to aſſiſt him in committing a robbery or murder, there can be no doubt that it is his duty to refuſe, and not only ſo, but to endeavour to prevent the perpetration of the deed.

3d, If he was aſked for money to carry ſuch purpoſe into effect, he is bound to refuſe; if he gave it he would be

as guilty of the design of robbery or murder as he who planned or executed it.

4th, No man or set of men, let them call themselves or be called what they please, or be they ever so numerous, can make an act which is immoral in itself, proper, or can have any power to authorise its commission.

5th, Man is bound to refuse committing robbery, murder, or other sinful act, and to resist its being perpetrated, if resistance be in his power, whether he is ordered or incited by one or ten thousand, or whether those who order him, call themselves, or are called Emperors, or Popes, or Kings, or Judges, or Senators, or Directors, or Parliaments, or Conventions.

These propositions, which are exceedingly plain, and indeed self-evident, shew how much it is the DUTY of every man in society to attend to the government and politics of the state in which he lives. This is his duty to his neighbour in the most extensive sense of the word—embracing the whole family of mankind. They likewise shew what regard should be paid to human laws; these are to be obeyed so far as they consist with the Divine will and no further. No human law can justify a breach of the law of God, and whenever laws are made in contradiction to it, they should be resisted.

This respect for, and obedience to human laws, has been one of the greatest causes of the calamities and wickedness which fill the annals of mankind. Reason was so corrupted, that men conceived themselves justified in killing their fellow creatures and taking their property, and otherwise torturing them, if there was what was called a law commanding it.

This assumed power in no wise differs from that said to have been claimed by the Popes of forgiving sins; for the pretending to authorise the commission of a sin, and the pretending to pardon it after its commission, are equally antichristian, and will equally be destroyed.

Let this reaſoning be applied to the preſent ſtate of the Iriſh nation as an inſtance; we are engaged in a war, and every man and every woman in the nation, who pays taxes, contributes to its ſupport; the taxes go to the government, and with them the government, carry on the war. Every perſon who drinks whiſkey, or any thing ſtronger than water—every perſon who wears ſhoes pays ſomething to the government; it is therefore clearly their duty to know in what manner their money, the produce of their labour, is applied; if it is to a bad purpoſe they are accountable; if the war be unjuſt on our part, every man killed in it by the Iriſh is *murdered*, and every acquiſition made by it is *robbery*. Now let every perſon ſeriouſly aſk himſelf what injury did the French do to the Iriſh—and how are we juſtified in making war on them. In anſwer to this, we may be told that the country is thriving and proſperous—but it is not fact. The proſperity of a nation does not conſiſt in the acquiſition of immenſe fortunes by any claſs of men, ſuch as merchants or landholders. The proſperity of a ſtate has been well defined by the excellent Mr. TYTLER in his Hiſtorical Regiſter, "if the majority can procure a comfortable ſubſiſtence with little labour, and have ſomething to ſhare with thoſe who are in want, the ſtate of the people is flouriſhing; but on the other hand, if they feel that they can ſcarce live upon their income, and that this income can only be procured by inceſſant toil, that the moment this toil is interrupted they are in abſolute want, then the country does not flouriſh." Now it is notorious that the majority of the people in this country are in a ſtate of extreme poverty, that it is by hard and inceſſant labour that they can ſubſiſt, and if ſickneſs or accidents befal them they are almoſt deprived of the means of exiſtence. But, ſuppoſing for a moment, that by the war proſperity and affluence, ſufficient to ſatiate avarice, was brought home to every individual of the nation; ſtill, if the war was unjuſt, this wealth

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would only be the fruits of robbery and murder. If the Engliſh, or any other people, think gold a ſufficient cauſe to ſhed blood—if they they are ſatisfied to fill the world with carnage and miſery, that they may acquire cloves, and nutmegs, and contracts, and ſlaves, let it not be ſo with us, —let juſtice be the rule of our conduct, and let us not, for any human conſideration, incur the diſpleaſure of the Deity.

Many good people exclaim—What! would you make confuſion at home? Are we not at peace here, and is not peace a great bleſſing? We ſee nor feel none of the battles and calamities which involve other countries. But let theſe *good* people conſider how great a number they deprive of that greateſt of ſublunary bleſſings, and how much of theſe misfortunes they themſelves occaſion, and for which they muſt certainly *be anſwerable*. Let not Ireland be conſidered as unimportant in the war; immenſe ſums have been voted to its ſupport. It has been calculated that near *one-third* of the ſeamen in the Britiſh navy are Iriſh. Above 150,000 Iriſh ſoldiers have been employed in the war. Mankind are uſed to diſregard actions which do not immediately fall under their obſervation. Let us for a moment conſider the miſeries which this multitude of men have inflicted on people who never injured them; the number of our fellow-creatures whom they have killed or mangled; the widows and orphans that they have made, who cry to heaven for redreſs; the plunder, violence, rapes, maſſacres, confuſion, flight, affliction, anguiſh, deſpair and horror which they have occaſioned, and which are incident to and inſeparable from the execrable trade of war. Are then theſe dreadful ſcenes leſs real, or are the Iriſh nation leſs accountable for them becauſe they are acted at a diſtance, becauſe they occur in France, Flanders, in Holland, in the Atlantic, in the Eaſt or Weſt Indies, than if they occurred at home?

Conſider beſide the number of theſe your countrymen who have themſelves periſhed by diſeaſe, famine and the ſword; think of the men torn, without even the form of legal proceſs, from their deſtitute innocent families under the name of defenders, by a ſet of deteſtable ruffians; crammed on board of ſhips of war, and there forced to fight in a cauſe which, perhaps, they thought wrong. The North American ſavages are ſuperior to ſuch a practice. When they go to war, every man of the tribe who diſapproves of it is at liberty to remain at home or peaceably follow his avocations of hunting: but here, a man may be forced to act againſt his reaſon and his conſcience, or be expoſed to ſuch torments as all men's fortitude is not equal to withſtand. Are the Iriſh nation aware that this conteſt involves the queſtion of the ſlave trade, the one now of the greateſt conſequence on the face of the earth? Are they willing to employ their treaſure and their blood in ſupport of that ſyſtem, becauſe England has 70 or 7000 millions engaged in it, the only argument that can be adduced in its favour, *monſtrous* as it may appear? Do they know that that horrid traffic ſpreads its influence over the globe; that it creates and perpetuates barbariſm and miſery, and prevents the ſpreading of civilization and religion, in which we profeſs to believe? Do they know that by it thouſands and hundreds of thouſands of theſe miſerable Africans are dragged from their innocent families like the miſerable defenders, tranſported to various places, and there treated with ſuch a ſyſtem of cruelty, torment, wickedneſs and infamy, that it is impoſſible for language adequately to expreſs its horror and guilt, and which would appear rather to be the work of wicked demons then of men. If this trade is wrong, is it right for the Iriſh nation to endeavour to continue it? And does not every man who contributes to the war contribute to its ſupport? After this ſtatement of the immediate and remote conſequence of war; after its appearing that every man who pays taxes contributes

to it and to every act of the government of his country, is it not evident that it is not only the right but the *essential duty* of every man to interest himself in the conduct of the government; and with what indignation should that infamous intolerable proposition be rejected, that the mass of the people have no right to meddle in politics, which has been so long and so successfully propagated by these "calm thinking villains," who arrogate to themselves the government of mankind? In that great and dreadful day when all the human race shall appear in the presence of their creator and judge; when the heavens and earth shall fly away from his face, and the guilty shall in vain call upon the rocks and mountains to hide and cover them; when the innocent blood which has been shed shall be avenged, what answer could be made?—"Lord, we never saw these things; they are not our doing; we only paid for them, and we were TOLD that it was not our business to mind politics."—Remember his words when on earth—he instructed us how to regard and compassionate all mankind.—"In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these ye did it not to ME."

The great object of mankind should be to consider themselves as accountable for their actions to God *alone*, and to pay no regard or obedience to any men or institution, which is not conformable to his will. It is on this account that liberty should be sought and is truly estimable; by breaking and destroying those prejudices and institutions which made man bow down before man, or his law; and to these Idols of his own making, offer up the sacrifice of his abilities, his judgment, his conscience, and his eternal happiness.

It appears that the Irish nation have not that portion of liberty, which would give them an efficient weight in their government; that this want of liberty arises from want of union among the people; that by union the people would acquire sufficient weight to give political integrity and virtue

to their government, and liberty, peace and happineſs to themſelves; and that they are bound by every conſideration of intereſt, of prudence, of reaſon, of juſtice, of mercy, and of religion, to purſue that union in defiance and in contempt of every human obſtacle; the means are the moſt delightful that life can afford, the cultivation of brotherly love to our fellow-creatures, and the end the greateſt that the imagination of man can conceive, that of being acceptable in the ſight of the Almighty, all perfect and adorable author of Nature.

THOMAS RUSSELL.

BELFAST,
September 11, 1796.

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